

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for recording interactions reflected in messages, the method comprising the computer-implemented steps of:
 - intercepting a message that has been sent from a first participant to a second participant prior to said message arriving at said second participant;
 - wherein intercepting the message is performed by an intercepting device deployed between the first participant and the second participant ~~coupled between a plurality of clients and a plurality of servers,~~ wherein the message is addressed to said second participant ~~and not to said device;~~
 - wherein said message includes identifier information;
 - wherein said intercepting device has access to the message and can interpret the identifier information contained within the message;
 - wherein said first participant is one of a service requestor and a service provider and the second participant is the other of the service requestor and the service provider;
 - wherein the intercepting device is managed by a third party that is different from said service requestor and said service provider
 - ~~on said device,~~ determining the identity of the first participant based on said identifier information in said message;
 - based on the intercepted message, software managed by the third party performing the steps of:
 - ~~on said device,~~ determining whether said message has billing implications;
 - ~~on said device,~~ if said message has billing implications, ~~using said identity to maintain a log of the interaction between said first participant by~~

~~said second participant, wherein said interaction involves one or more messages sent by the first participant that are addressed to the second participant, and one or more messages sent by the second participant that are addressed to the first participant; and sending data to a billing service, the data including information related to the identity.~~

~~wherein said log is based at least in part on reply messages that pass through said device.~~

2. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1 further comprising the steps of:
identifying, based on the intercepted message, which a services are that is being or has been provided to said clients-service requestor by said servers-service provider based on the content of~~through,~~ at least in part, the intercepted messages that pass through said device; and
in response to identifying, based on the intercepted message, that the service is being or has been provided, billing one of said clients-the service requestor or service provider for said services-based on which services are being provided to said clients by said servers.
3. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 2 wherein:
~~the device is controlled by a first party, and the services are provided by a set of second parties; and~~
the ~~first~~third party performs the step of billing on behalf of the ~~set of second parties~~ the service provider.
4. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim ~~1-73~~ further comprising the computer-implemented step of:
using said log to charge a particular participant for a service indicated in the message, wherein said particular participant is one of said first participant and said second participant.

5. (Canceled)
6. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim ~~4~~73 wherein the log includes information to indicate how much the particular participant is to pay for the service.
7. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim ~~4~~73 further comprising the computer-implemented step of:
~~sending~~reading a plurality of logs, including said log, ~~to~~at an aggregation engine that places access information contained in said plurality of logs into the format required by a billing system.
8. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim ~~4~~2 further comprises:
determining that the particular participant must pre-pay for the service;
determining whether the particular participant has sufficient funds to pay for the service; and
determining how to handle said message based on whether said particular participant has sufficient funds to pay for the service.
9. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim ~~4~~2 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:
inspecting one of a provider profile associated with the service provider or a requestor profile associated with the service requestor; and
based on the provider profile or the requestor profile, determining that the service requestor must pre-pay for the service ~~based on the provider profile~~.
10. (Canceled)
11. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim ~~4~~2 further wherein the message is a response from the service provider and includes a price at which the service provider is willing to provide the service.

12. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim 42 wherein the service involves providing content from the service provider.
13. (Canceled)
14. (Canceled)
15. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim 42 further comprising the step of updating a service requestor profile based on the service that is requested.
16. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim 42 further comprising the step of decrementing an account balance of the particular participant when the service requestor accesses the service.
17. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim 42 further comprising the step of determining from the message the service that is requested by the service requestor.
18. (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented step of:
 - locating a profile based on the identity of the first participant.
19. (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented step of:
 - storing billing data associated with the service requestor in the profile.
20. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented step of:
 - determining from the profile a price that the service requestor will pay for a service ~~from the profile~~.

21. (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented step of:

billing the service requestor if the profile indicates that the service requestor is to be billed.

22. (Original) The method for Claim 18 wherein the step of locating the profile further comprises the computer-implemented step of:

extracting a participant ID from the message; and
locating the profile based on a participant ID.

23. (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising maintaining an account balance in the profile.

24. (Previously Presented) The method for Claim 18 further comprising decrementing an account balance of the service requestor when the service requestor accesses a service wherein the service was specified in the message and wherein the service requires a fee.

25. (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising updating the profile to award the service requestor a prize for having requested said service.

26. (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of.

extracting a number from the profile;
wherein the number indicates the number of times the service requestor has requested a service;
incrementing the number;
storing the number back into the profile; and
determining whether to bill the service requestor for the service based on the number.

27. (Canceled)

28. (Canceled)

29. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

if the service requestor requires pre-authorization for a service, then
 sending the service requestor a payment authorization request message;
 and
if the service requestor authorizes payment for the service, then
 retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for
 the service requestor.

30. (Original) The method for Claim 29 further comprising inspecting a profile to determine whether the service requestor requires pre-authorization for the service.

31. (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

 determining whether the service requestor has funds to pay for a service based on
 an authorization source.

32. (Original) The method for Claim 31 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

if the service requestor has the funds, then
 causing the funds to be decremented from a requestor account associated
 with the service requestor; and
 retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for
 the service requestor.

33. (Currently Amended) The method for Claim 31 wherein the authorization source is one of a profile, a billing system, and a billing scheme of an access provider.

34. (Canceled)

35. (Canceled)

36. (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

determining whether the service provider is an authorized partner; and

if the service provider is an authorized partner, then

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain a service.

37. (Original) The method for Claim 36 wherein the step of determining whether the service provider is an approved partner further comprises the computer-implemented steps of:

determining whether the service involves a fee by inspecting a provider profile;

if the service does involve a fee, then

establishing a secure connection with the provider; and

authenticating the service provider by using an authentication mechanism.

38. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable storage medium storing instructions for performing the steps of:

intercepting a message that has been sent from a first participant to a second

participant prior to said message arriving at said second participant;

wherein intercepting the message is performed by an intercepting device

deployed between the first participant and the second participant

~~coupled between a plurality of clients and a plurality of servers,~~

wherein the message is addressed to said second participant ~~and~~

~~not to said device;~~

wherein said message includes identifier information;

wherein said intercepting device has access to the message and can

interpret the identifier information contained within the message;

wherein said first participant is one of a service requestor and a service

provider and the second participant is the other of the service

requestor and the service provider;

wherein the intercepting device is managed by a third party that is different

from said service requestor and said service provider

~~on said device,~~ determining the identity of the first participant based on said

identifier information in said message;

based on the intercepted message, software managed by the third party performing

the steps of:

~~on said device,~~ determining whether said message has billing implications;

~~on said device,~~ if said message has billing implications, ~~using said identity~~

~~to maintain a log of the interaction between said first participant by~~

~~said second participant, wherein said interaction involves one or~~

~~more messages sent by the first participant that are addressed to the~~

~~second participant, and one or more messages sent by the second~~

~~participant that are addressed to the first participant; and sending~~

~~data to a billing service, the data including information related to~~

~~the identity.~~

~~wherein said log is based at least in part on reply messages that pass~~

~~through said device.~~

39. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for of~~ Claim ~~38-84~~
further comprising instructions for:

using said log to charge a particular participant for a service indicated in the

message, wherein said particular participant is one of said first participant

and said second participant.

40. (Canceled)

41. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for of~~ Claim ~~39-84~~ wherein the log includes information to indicate how much the particular participant is to pay for the service.

42. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for of~~ Claim ~~39-84~~ further comprising instructions for ~~sending-reading~~ a plurality of logs, including said log, ~~to at~~ an aggregation engine that places access information contained in said plurality of logs into the format required by a billing system.

43. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for of~~ Claim ~~39-88~~ further comprises instructions for:

- determining that the particular participant must pre-pay for the service;
- determining whether the particular participant has sufficient funds to pay for the service; and
- determining how to handle said message based on whether said particular participant has sufficient funds to pay for the service.

44. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for of~~ Claim ~~39-88~~ further comprising instructions for:

- inspecting one of a provider profile associated with the service provider or a requestor profile associated with the service requestor; and
- based on the provider profile or the requestor profile, determining that the service requestor must pre-pay for the service ~~based on the provider profile~~.

45. (Canceled)

46. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for~~ of Claim ~~39-88~~ wherein the message is a response from the service provider and includes a price at which the service provider is willing to provide the service.

47. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for~~ of Claim ~~39-88~~ wherein the service involves providing content from the service provider.

48. (Canceled)

49. (Canceled)

50. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for~~ of Claim ~~39-88~~ further comprising instructions for updating a service requestor profile based on the service that is requested.

51. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for~~ of Claim ~~39-88~~ further comprising instructions for decrementing an account balance of the particular participant when the service requestor accesses the service.

52. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for~~ of Claim ~~39-88~~ further comprising instructions for determining from the message the service that is requested by the service requestor.

53. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 38 further comprising instructions for:

locating a profile based on the identity of the first participant.

54. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 further comprising instructions for:

storing billing data associated with the service requestor in the profile.

55. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 further comprising instructions for:

determining from the profile a price that the service requestor will pay ~~for a service from the profile~~.

56. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 further comprising instructions for:

billing the service requestor if the profile indicates that the service requestor is to be billed.

57. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 wherein instructions for locating the profile further comprises instructions for:

extracting a participant ID from the message; and
locating the profile based on a participant ID.

58. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 further comprising instructions for maintaining an account balance in the profile.

59. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 further comprising instructions for decrementing an account balance of the service requestor when the service requestor accesses a service wherein the service was specified in the message and wherein the service requires a fee.

60. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 further comprising instructions for updating the profile to award the service requestor a prize for having requested said service.

61. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 53 further comprising instructions for:

extracting a number from the profile;

wherein the number indicates the number of times the service requestor
has requested a service;
incrementing the number;
storing the number back into the profile; and
determining whether to bill the service requestor for the service based on the
number.

62. (Canceled)

63. (Canceled)

64. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 38
further comprising instructions for:

if the service requestor requires pre-authorization for a service, then
sending the service requestor a payment authorization request message;
and
if the service requestor authorizes payment for the service, then
retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for
the service requestor.

65. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 64
further comprising instructions for inspecting a profile to determine whether the service
requestor requires pre-authorization for the service.

66. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 38
further comprising instructions for:

determining whether the service requestor has funds to pay for a service based on
an authorization source.

67. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 66 further comprising instructions for:

if the service requestor has the funds, then

causing the funds to be decremented from a requestor account associated

with the service requestor; and

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for the service requestor.

68. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for~~ of Claim 66 wherein the authorization source is one of a profile, a billing system, and a billing scheme of an access provider.

69. (Canceled)

70. (Canceled)

71. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium of ~~for~~ Claim 38 further comprising instructions for:

determining whether the service provider is an authorized partner; and

if the service provider is an authorized partner, then

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain a service.

72. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium ~~for~~ of Claim 71 wherein instructions for determining whether the service provider is an approved partner further comprise instructions for:

determining whether the service involves a fee by inspecting a provider profile;

if the service does involve a fee, then

establishing a secure connection with the provider; and

authenticating the service provider by using an authentication mechanism.

73. (New) The method of Claim 1, further comprising:
at the intercepting device, generating a log of said message;
wherein the data sent to the billing service is based on the log.
74. (New) The method of Claim 73, wherein:
the software managed by the third party is executed by the intercepting device;
and
generating the log of said message occurs in response to the software determining
that the message has billing implications.
75. (New) The method of Claim 73, wherein:
the intercepting device generates the log without determining whether the message
has billing implications; and
determining whether the message has billing implications further comprises
analyzing the log of said message.
76. (New) The method of Claim 75, further comprising, at an aggregation engine
external to the intercepting device, reading the log, wherein the software managed by the
third party executes at an aggregation engine.
77. (New) The method of Claim 2, further comprising billing the service provider for
providing the service.
78. (New) A computer-implemented method for providing access to content, the
method comprising:
at an intercepting device deployed between a client and a provider:
intercepting a message originating from the client and directed to the
provider;
wherein the message comprises a request for a first service
provided at a server operated by the provider;

wherein the message includes an address associated with the client;
wherein the intercepting device intercepts the message prior to the
provider receiving the message;
based at least on the address, determining an identity associated with the
client;
based at least on the identity, determining a class of service to which a user
associated with the identity is entitled;
based on the class of service, selecting one of the following actions:
(1) refusing to transmit the request to the provider;
(2) transmitting a modified request to the provider;
performing the selected action.

79. (New) The method of Claim 78, wherein the selected action is refusing to transmit the request to the provider, wherein determining to refuse to transmit the request to the provider comprises determining that the class of service does not entitle the user to any service from the provider.

80. (New) The method of Claim 79, further comprising sending the client a second message indicating that the client is not allowed access to the service

81. (New) The method of Claim 78, wherein the selected action is transmitting a modified request to the provider, wherein transmitting the modified request comprises:
based at least on the class of service, determining a particular service to which the
user is entitled;
generating a modified request for the particular service based on the request for
the first service;
transmitting the modified request for the particular service to the provider.

82. (New) The method of Claim 81, wherein the particular service is different than the first service.

83. (New) The method of Claim 78, wherein determining the class of service further comprises determining whether the client has funds to pay for a particular service based on an authorization source.

84. (New) The computer-readable storage medium of Claim 38, further storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform:

at the intercepting device, generating a log of said message;

wherein the data sent to the billing service is based on the log.

85. (New) The computer-readable storage medium of Claim 84, wherein:

the software managed by the third party is executed by the intercepting device;

and

generating the log of said message occurs in response to the software determining

that the message has billing implications.

86. (New) The computer-readable storage medium of Claim 84, wherein:

the intercepting device generates the log without determining whether the message

has billing implications; and

determining whether the message has billing implications further comprises

analyzing the log of said message.

87. (New) The computer-readable storage medium of Claim 86, further storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform:

at an aggregation engine external to the intercepting device, reading the log,

wherein the software managed by the third party executes at an

aggregation engine.

88. (New) The computer-readable storage medium of Claim 38, further storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform:

identifying, based on the intercepted message, a service that is being or has been provided to said service requestor by said service provider through, at least in part, the intercepted message; and

in response to identifying, based on the intercepted message, that the service is being or has been provided, billing one of the service requestor or service provider for said service.

89. (New) The computer-readable storage medium of Claim 88, further storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform:

billing the service provider for providing the service.

90. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform the method recited in Claim 78.

91. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform the method recited in Claim 79.

92. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform the method recited in Claim 80.

93. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform the method recited in Claim 81.

94. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform the method recited in Claim 82.

95. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing one or more sequences of instructions which, when executed by one or more processors, causes the one or more processors to perform the method recited in Claim 83.